

University Museum Releases 2009 Collectible Holiday Keepsake

Contributed by Sarah Cure
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OXFORD, Miss. - Just in time for the holidays, the University of Mississippi Museum has released its 2009 collectible keepsake, this year commemorating the life work of renowned folk artist and Lafayette County native Theora Hamblett.

The one-of-a-kind keepsake depicts Oxford's historic Theora Hamblett House where the self-taught, primitive artist created her signature oil paintings. Produced by a photo chemical etching process, the gold-plated collectible can be purchased at the museum's gift shop for \$15 plus tax and shipped for an additional \$5.

"The collectible keepsake is a great tradition started by the museum in 2001 as a way to commemorate specific structures important to the city of Oxford, the University of Mississippi and Lafayette County as a means to promote the general concept of historic preservation," said William Andrews, director of University Museum and Historic Houses. "These are very popular gifts that people enjoy giving and receiving because they represent our appreciation for cultural heritage."

Designed and built circa 1872 by Swedish immigrant G.M. Torgerson, the house on Van Buren Avenue was purchased by Hamblett in 1939. To generate income, she rented space to college students and newlyweds but later converted the four apartments into her studio.

The structure was an example of Carpenter Gothic architecture, but the top of the house burned in 1929 and was rebuilt with a typical 1930s eave, said Margaret Fancher, owner of the house since August 1977.

"I think it's great the museum chose the Theora Hamblett House for the 2009 collectible keepsake," Fancher said. "There are many antebellum and Victorian houses in Oxford, but what makes this house special is this is where Theora Hamblett did her paintings."

The museum is in the midst of planning a traveling exhibit to showcase Hamblett's original paintings, most of which she willed to the university before her death in 1977, Andrews said.

"We thought this would be a good way to commemorate her (Hamblett's) presence in Oxford and celebrate her reputation as a national folk artist and visionary figure," Andrews said.

Previous University Museum collectibles include the Skipwith House (which was also designed by Torgerson), the Brandt Memory House, Lyceum, Ventress Hall, Barnard Observatory, Lafayette County Courthouse, Rowan Oak and Oxford City Hall.

The complete nine-piece set of collectible keepsakes is also available for \$120 plus tax and an additional fee for shipping.

The University Museum Gift Shop is open 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 1-4:30 p.m. Sundays. For more information or to place orders using a credit card, call 662-915-7073. Orders to be shipped in time for Christmas delivery must be placed by December 15.

To learn more about the University Museum, visit http://olemiss.edu/university_museum.